



The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.

Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.

MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2016-2018

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The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak
ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase

2018 MEETINGS

- 27 January** – Member Meeting
Okemos Public Library
- 20 February** – Executive Committee
- 20 March** – Executive Committee
- 21 April** – Member Meeting
MSU Detroit Center
- 29 May** – Executive Committee
- June** – Meeting Cancelled
- 28 July** – Executive Committee
Durand Union Station
- 7-9 August** – Michigan Rail Conference
Saginaw State University
- September** – Outreach Event
Grand Rapids Art Prize
- 27 October** – Member Meeting
Location TBA
- November** – Annual Meeting
- December** – Executive Committee

Visit www.marp.org
Email marprail@yahoo.com

Times They Are A-Changin'

"Some parts of Amtrak's business have operated in the same manner for 47 years, and the world is changing around us. Passengers today have different expectations, desires, and alternatives than they did in the past. For Amtrak to respond to these changes and remain relevant, we need to carefully review how we allocate our resources, deploy our assets, and position our products... We are thinking carefully about how to attract the largest number of customers with an approach that is relevant, fresh, and financially sustainable."

These are the words of Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson in a **May 29 letter** to the American Association of Private Railroad Car Owners in response to the group's concerns with changes in Amtrak's operating procedures.

The "private varnish" owners are not the only group experiencing anxiety amidst the swirl of real and rumored changes taking place at Amtrak. At the same time, a number of commentators are urging advocates to avoid over reacting and, instead, take the longer view.

Jim Mathews, CEO of the **Rail Passengers Association**, spoke at the annual meeting of **All Aboard Ohio** on May 12. He seemed encouraged by a recent conversation with Amtrak Board Chairman Anthony Coscia in which Coscia gave assurances that the Board has no plans to eliminate long-distance trains. Coscia's message was that the Board is focused on what the network will look like 40 years from now, recognizing that the generation coming up cares less about sleeper coaches and full-service dining and more about reliability, Wi-Fi and outlets at every seat.

Mathews was critical, however, of what he sees as a lack of transparency in the decision-making process driving changes, the consequences of which are worrisome. He cited the fact that Amtrak has just received the **largest appropriation in its 47-year history** in a FY2018 budget that increases by \$1.3 B the amounts targeted specifically at inter-city rail programs. He continued, "We should be running a victory lap," but instead find ourselves fighting, once again, to save the Southwest Chief—this time

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NO MEMBER MEETING IN JUNE

The Executive Committee will meet on July 28 in the Board Room, Durand Union Station. Your comments and ideas are welcome as planning for the rest of the year goes forward.

Please contact Steve Vagnozzi for further information.
svagnozzi@comcast.net 517-349-4809



Michigan Rail Conference

“End to End Journeys – Integrating Partners”

August 7-9, 2018

Saginaw State University

This year’s conference theme, *Improving End to End Journeys: Integrating Partners*, reflects current business realities and potential economic impacts of railroading in Michigan. Partnering rail transportation with its customers and with other modes of transportation enables rail to cover the first and last mile of the journey, and everything between. Conference speakers will draw from experiences locally, statewide and nationwide to bring a broad perspective. The conference provides a valuable opportunity for learning and networking.

Events will kick off Tuesday morning with the **Student Scholarship Fundraiser Golf Outing** at the Saginaw Valley Golf Course, followed by the **Opening Reception at the offices of Lake State Railway**.

Technical Sessions will take place all day Wednesday at the SVSU Conference Center.

Ray Lang, Senior Director, Amtrak National State Relations, joins the opening plenary session to explore the conference theme of improving end-to-end journeys. The second plenary panel will provide updates on Michigan rail activities. Afternoon sessions will cover rail shippers, passenger rail, safety, short line railroads, and PTC, winding up the day with a discussion of autonomous vehicles.

Thursday **field trips** feature visits to Sargent Docks, Michigan Sugar Factory, Saginaw Bay Fertilizer Terminal, Port Fisher Terminal, and Bit Mat. An afternoon **rail excursion to Grayling** will be hosted by Lake State Railway.

EARLY BIRD Registration ends Friday, June 22.

A block of rooms at Four Points by Sheraton-Saginaw will be held until July 9 for conference participants.

To register, view the complete 3-day Agenda, and learn about lodging

Visit www.rail.mtu.edu/mrc2018.

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because Amtrak management is **withdrawing its support** for a TIGER grant to upgrade track on a portion of the route.

Mathews also expressed the view that CEO Anderson may not understand that he is no longer running a for-profit company focused on making money for its shareholders. In Mathews’ view, Amtrak, as a government run enterprise, is required “to minimize the subsidy required”, but not to make a profit.

Subsequent to the All Aboard Ohio meeting, Mathews gained some clarity on what Amtrak management is thinking on some of the issues of concern.

At a May 16 Senate hearing, Stephen Gardner, Chief Commercial Office of Amtrak, was asked by Sen. Daines of Montana if there are plans to reduce *Empire Builder* service. According to the **RPA report on the hearing**, Gardner’s “careful” response was that Amtrak does not “plan to institute tri-weekly service on the *Empire Builder*.” With somewhat more candor, he went on to state that no plans exist for permanent reductions in service through Amtrak’s next authorization in 2020. A week later, Mathews had a

face-to-face meeting with Anderson in which the Amtrak chief stated that “there are no immediate plans to suspend service on any long distance routes.” The two leaders covered a wide range of topics, including PTC, the growth potential in state-sponsored corridors, and ideas about food service, which are summarized in **the May 25 issue of RPA’s Hotline**.

Mathews concludes “In any case, the long-term shape of the national network will be determined by Congress, which makes the upcoming reauthorization of the surface transportation bill even more important to RPA and its members. He added that RPA will continue its outreach and education efforts to congressional representatives and senators.



We’re waiting to hear from you
(And you know who you are!)

Go to **PayPal** to renew your membership

Or download a mail-in form **HERE**

A2TC Picks Up Steam

Consultants looking at the prospects for restoring passenger train service between Ann Arbor and Traverse City—dubbed the A2TC project—have been, in their words, “blown away” by the projected increase in tourism in the Traverse City and Petoskey area over the next couple of decades: a doubling of the current 6 million annual visitors. Add to that the 90,000 college students along the line and you’re talking real potential.

Preliminary results presented in April to stakeholders in Traverse City, Petoskey and Ann Arbor indicate a level of demand that justifies the return of trains to the area. A reporter from the Traverse City Ticker was present at the event and submitted [this excellent report](#).

The [Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities](#) has recently released a [VIDEO](#) explaining the project and introducing some of the people who are excited about the prospect of future train service.

The study is being conducted by Transportation Economics and Management Systems (TEMS). John Langdon represents MARP on the steering committee.



The Future of Rail May Have Already Begun in Florida

By Jacob Wallace
Summer by Rail Correspondent

“By offering premium service on new trainsets, Brightline is betting that lurking beneath the frustrating landscape of rail policy is a demand for efficient rail service just waiting to be tapped.”

In Florida, a brand-new passenger rail line shuttling people between Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach that will eventually reach Orlando is changing perceptions of what’s possible. Though not a true high-speed rail line like those in Europe, the train still operates faster than most Amtrak lines in between stops, and via a noticeably smoother ride.

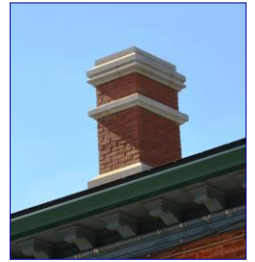
To read more of the new Summer by Rail blog post, and to follow Jacob’s journey, please visit summerbyrail.com.

Editor’s Note: This is the third year that the Rail Passenger Association has sent an intern around the country to promote the idea of train travel and to meet with planners and community leaders. In an added twist this year, visits to baseball parks provide a unifying theme for the journey.

A ride on Florida’s new Brightline train is well documented by [High Speed Rail America Club](#), a group of Florida International University students who are setting a high bar for advocacy among fellow millennials. Watch the video [HERE](#).

Jackson Amtrak Depot Chimneys Repaired

In May, Amtrak commenced work on rebuilding the red brick chimneys on the 145-year old Michigan Central Station in Jackson. Each of the eight chimneys will be disassembled down to the roofline and completely rebuilt using the correct materials and following the design of the original chimneys. The deteriorated condition of the chimneys was discovered while the building was being reroofed in 2016. The work is being performed by DC Byers Construction of Detroit and Lansing, a contractor specializing in the restoration of historic masonry buildings. The work is intended to retain the historic appearance of the building and the rebuilt chimneys do indeed look very nice.



Left, work underway on one of the three chimneys on the east tower section of the depot building. Right, a rebuilt chimney. Reporting and photos by John Guidinger.

Could The Michigan Line Lose Bragging Rights?



With the opening of New England’s new CTrail Hartford Line on June 16, the Michigan Amtrak line between Kalamazoo and the Indiana border may no longer be the only route outside the Northeast Corridor where trains travel 110 mph. (We Michiganders have never conceded our title to Illinois and its 15-mile stretch of higher-speed rail between Dwight and Pontiac IL.)

A new service linking New Haven and Hartford, in Connecticut, to Springfield, in Massachusetts, will nearly triple the frequency—from 12 to 34 trains each day. CTrail or Amtrak trains (both of which run on the Hartford Line) will travel at faster speeds, up to 110 mph, but only on a 7-mile stretch of the 62-mile route. The trip from New Haven to Springfield will take 81 minutes. Future improvements to the line will bring higher speeds to more of the route, but, for now, Michigan’s claim to fame appears safe.

STUDENT DISCOUNT IS BACK!

Thanks to the Michigan Department of Transportation, students are again eligible for a 15% discount for travel on Midwest routes. See page 4 for details.

Niles & Jackson Depots Lose Ticket Agents

As of April 2, 2018, passengers will no longer be able to purchase tickets at Amtrak stations in Niles and Jackson. Amtrak maintains that “almost all” ticket purchases are now made on-line. Thus, the position of ticket agent is being eliminated at stations across the county.

Interestingly, both Jackson and Niles stations will now be open longer hours than previously. The waiting room at Niles will be open 9am-10pm and at Jackson 7:30am-10:30pm. Caretakers will open and close the stations and provide a reassuring presence for waiting passengers.

Currently, only the Detroit and Ann Arbor stations are staffed full-time. Ticket offices in Flint, East Lansing, Dearborn, Battle Creek and Kalamazoo are staffed 8:00am-4:00pm, seven days a week. Unstaffed stations in Grand Rapids, Holland, St. Joseph, Royal Oak and Durand have Quik-Track kiosks for purchasing tickets. Persons without access to the internet may call 1-800-USA-RAIL. MARP reminds people that their local public library staff is always happy to assist in using the internet. For information about station hours, go to amtrak.com/stations/nls.html, substituting the desired station's three-letter code for **nls** in the URL.



Photo by JP DesCamp

Tod Virgil served as lead ticket agent at the Niles Depot for nearly 20 years. Amtrak never replaced his computer or provided a stand for the keyboard: note the ream of paper (actually 3 reams) that Tod, a tall person, devised to elevate the keyboard to a more comfortable position. Tod exemplifies all the best qualities of an agent who takes the job seriously and always goes the extra mile for the passenger. He will be missed by patrons of the Niles Depot. Their loss is Kalamazoo's gain as Tod has assumed the position of lead agent at the Amtrak station in Kalamazoo.



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